

LANGLEY, KENTUCKY

A Sociological Analysis of
Community Structure

Prepared for

Professor Robert Rennick

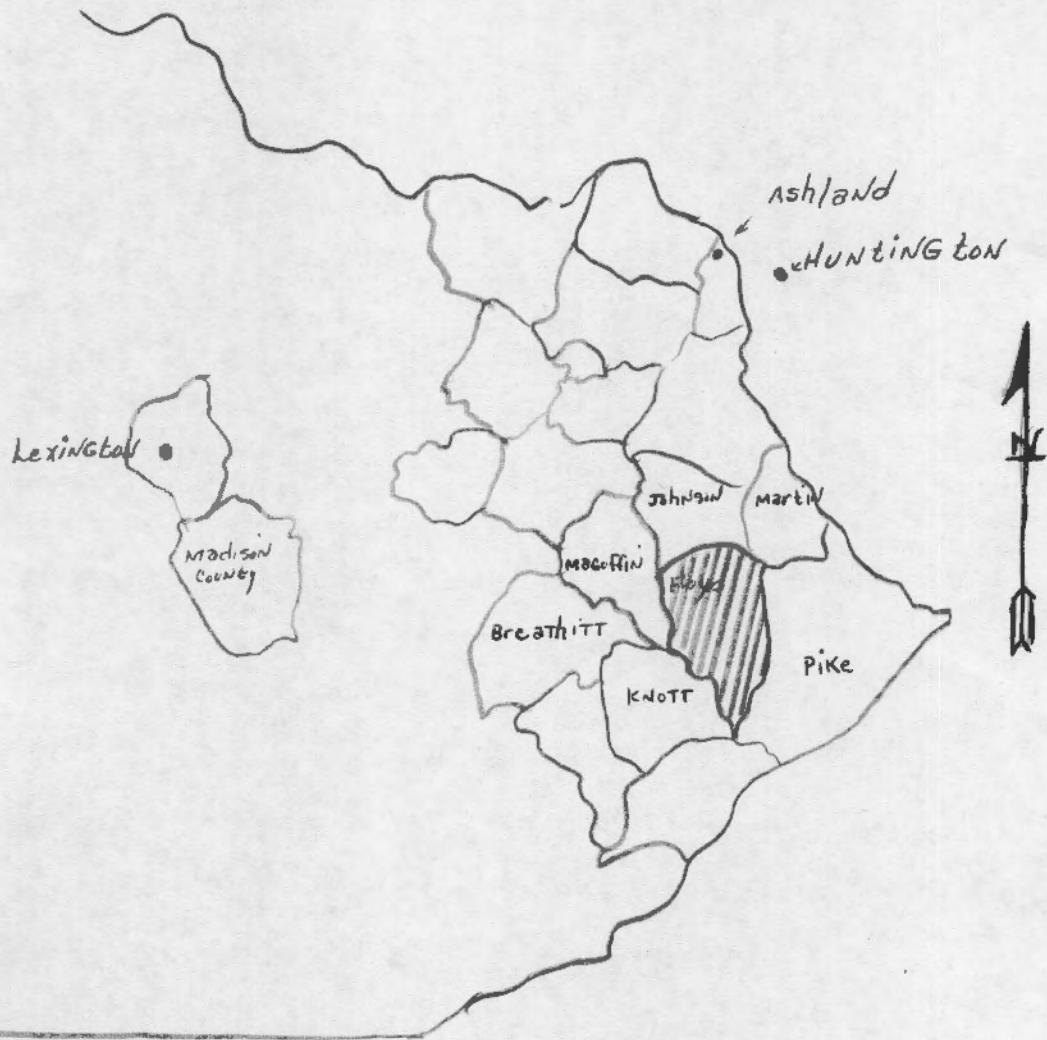
Submitted in partial completion of the Introduction to Sociology 213

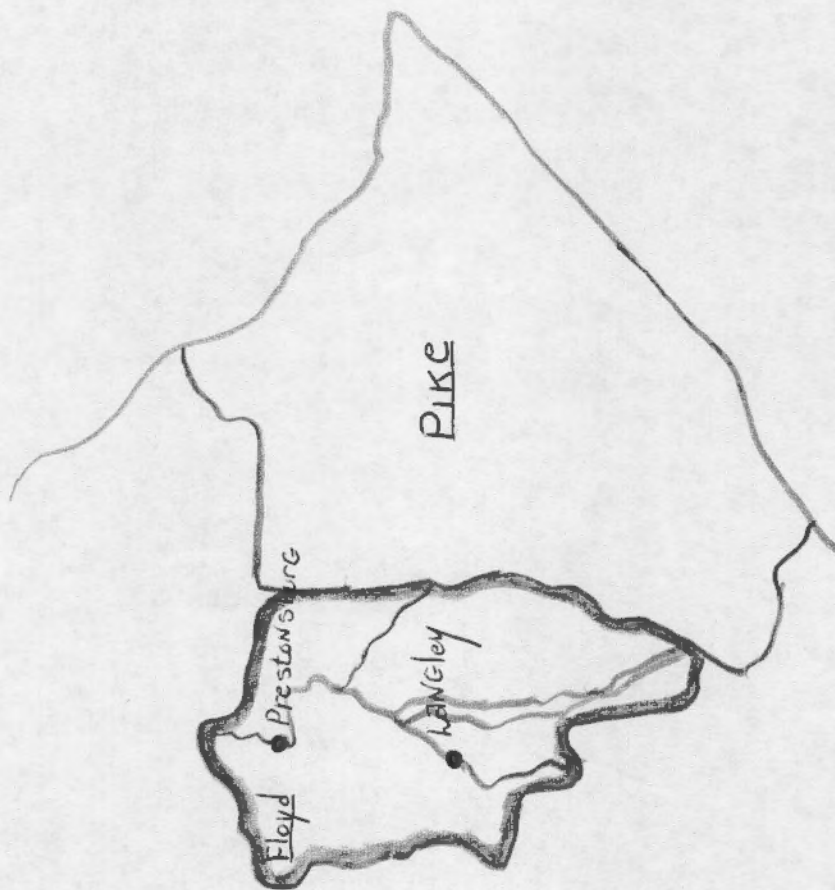
Ronald Hayes

May 21, 1962

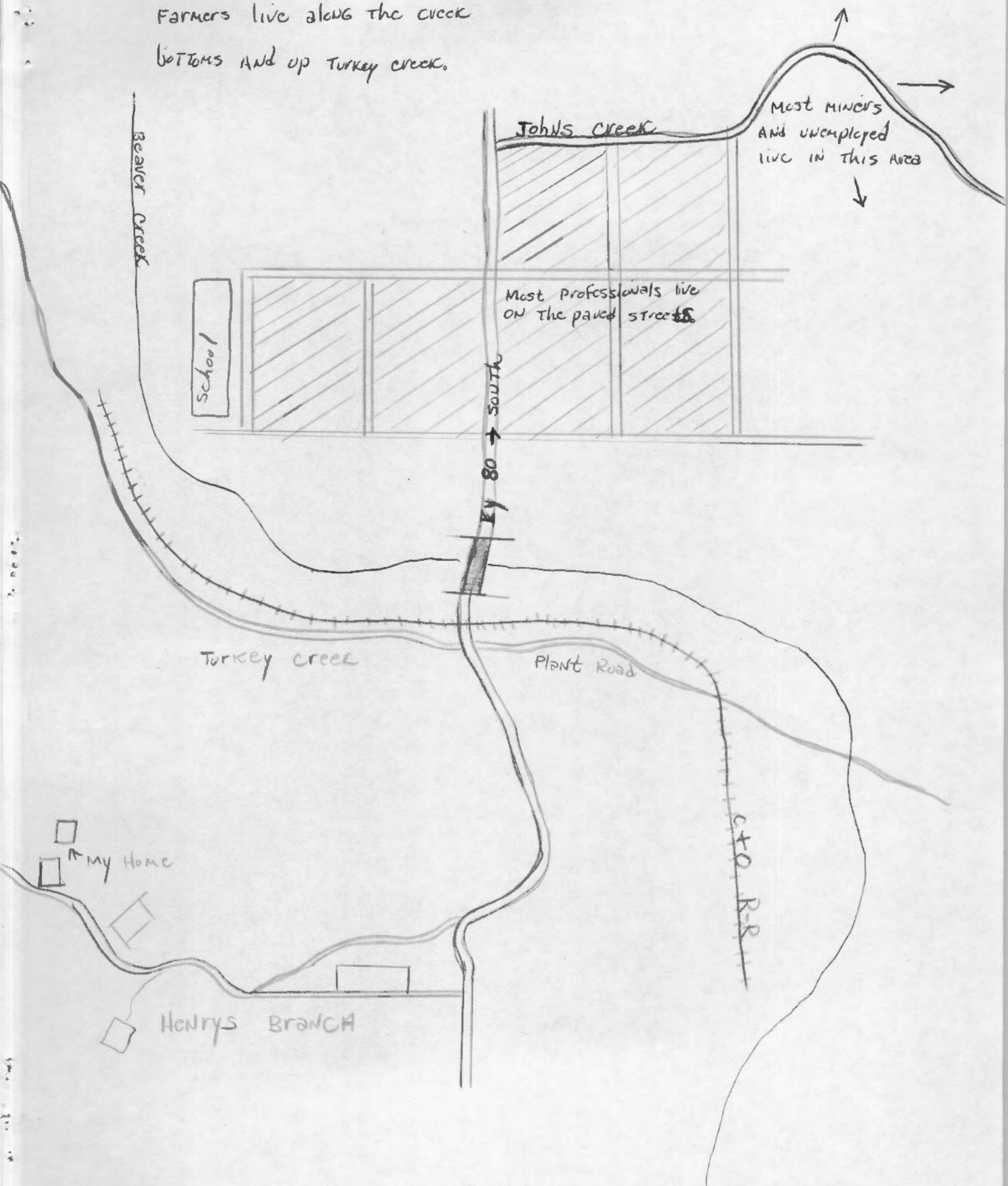
Berea, K.Y.

(B-)





Farmers live along the creek
bottoms and up Turkey creek.



Langley, Kentucky

Langley is a small community located on the banks of Beaver Creek. This stream runs NorthEasterly through the center of Floyd county and empties into the Big Sandy as it winds its way through the beautiful Eastern Kentucky mountains.

It is an unincorporated township of about 550 people as of 1960 and is located on K.Y. 80, about 18 miles Southwest of the county seat, Prestonsburg. The area is served by C & O railroad and various truck transport lines. Electricity is supplied by the KY. Power company and Gas is supplied by Langley Supply, a subdivision of the Bell Telephone Company, two local radio stations at Prestonsburg (WDOC & WPRT) and the county weekly newspaper, The Floyd County Times. Langley is also the central compressor point for o KY. + W.Va. Gas power lines which transport gas to many Northern Cities.

The KY. hydrocarbon Co inc employs about 40 people and about 100 are employed by the two gas compressor stations near.

There are 8 truck mines as listed;

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Number employed</u> |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Garth Coal Co. | 24 |
| Henry B Coal Co. | 10 |
| Hope | 12 |
| Howard and Newsome | 6 |
| Leslie Elkhorn | 19 |
| Miley Gusley | 7 |
| Reed and Hayes | 19 |
| Turner Branch | 5 |

The county is 401 miles square in size and had a total population of 41,642 in 1960 which was a 22% drop over the 1950 census of 53,500.

The area depends on Huntington-Ashland as their basic trading area but the trading is being lost for the census states that 12.4% of these people are considered unemployed and only 34.8% have full employment. The median income is \$2,802. Only about 5% of the people could be considered "Rural Farm" and their farms average only 49.3 acres valued at \$3,306.

In the entire county there are only 616 negroes and of the total population only 0.2% are foreign born and about 0.3% are of non white blood. Therefore this paper will refer to the native whites.

This area has a rich cultural and historical background dating back to the days when the stanch frontiersmen of good Scotch, Irish, English and German blood brought their culture with that of a group of well educated Virginians in 1797.

These people came to this area for a variety of reasons; first to trap but later to take advantage of the mildness of the weather and the richness of the deep black soil. This soil is of a sandy character and underlaid with a splendid clay subsoil, and it is strong and productive. The land is well watered and well drained & the timber supply is fairly extensive although large quantities of valuable timber have been cut and marketed.

Diversified farming is not engaged in, though fruit grows well here. The county is well underlaid with coal, both cannel and bituminous, gas and oil.

The people enjoyed a casual existance and social change has been slow resulting in life much as it was with the earlier settlers.

These descendents speak a language unique to the area; it resulted from a corruption of their ethnic heratage as it passed from generation to generation. Isolation allowed the people to prosper but many new values developed which resulted in a way of life far removed from that of the more rapidly changing cultural world in other near areas.

To illustrate some of the many changes in our way of life I would like to use members of my family as examples, at various points through this paper, for I feel that we are fairly typical. We live about 2 miles up a hollow where my grandfather built a house some 50 years ago; my father also built near his father about 25 years ago and we still reside there.

The land was rich but the techniques and the economy was one of a somewhat "Sacred" agrarian society until oil was found much later. Farms were usually small, averaging from 40-80 acres. The land became increasingly poorer and because land was cheap a larger family had to put more and more land into crops to feed itself. The food was usually pork, biscuits, gravy and supplemented by wild game, and garden vegetables.

It was within the isolation of these valleys that large families gained a consciousness of unity seldom excelled in modern society. When violence broke out the justice was self enforced and thus we have these family units producing the now famous "Feuds". These feuds weren't as common as one would be led to believe but violence did become a way of life.

During the earlier years of my grandfathers life, at the turn of this century, there was a great lack of political order and maturity. This violence often made itself most manifest at the weekend recreational events such as the Square Dances which were held for all to enjoy after a hard weeks work.. My grandfather was a "Galler" and according to him they would come from many miles to get him ^{to call "Square Dances"} but he stopped when he became a Baptist minister. These dances involved a lot of local drinking and at the last one there was a man shot and this convinced him that this wasn't his way of life although he had enjoyed the freedom involved, at a younger age.

The family was definately mother centered for she made most of the family decisions while the father was more personally free and left the home and kids to ~~his wife~~ ^{his wife}. The mother usually had to feed her large family and several "Hired hands" that helped the father with his ever increasing farm size. ^{There were 13 children in my Grandfathers family and usually} from 3 to 10 farm workers.

As I said before the father was free and very often had to be away on business (such as cattle selling) and because of the difficulty in travel and time involved it became the mothers place to see that the children got to the Church, ball games or school. Church was an important sociological unit that allowed the people to visit each other and acted as a unit of sanction within the area but my dad resented it for it took his parents away for long periods of time.

Until very recently the medicine was poor and had a lot of ~~superstition~~ ^ssuperstition involved in the "Home remedies" but the first doctors held a special spot in the memory of the people and are still spoken of by the older people. The greatest problems had to deal with the use of "Creek Water" and impure water from dug wells which produced typhoid.

As the years passed, separation and isolation from the outside world became very desirable to these highly inbred and clanish people. The only teachers were local people who taught school only when the crops weren't in or when the kids weren't needed at home. My grandfather and grandmother had only a few days of schooling and have learned to write within the past 30 years.

The first person to break though this anti-intellectism was a Miss Lloyd who came from New York after an unhappy love affair and in 1923 she literally forced these people to develop a grade school, high school and finally a small Jr. College called "Caney". I feel that this school can be given the majority of the credit for ^{our} ~~us~~ having many of the local people well educ ted for she brought many of the best retired teachers from New York and trained many local people for the highly skilled professions.

This institution allows students to get a 2 year education at no cost other than some labor for the college (2 hours ^{A day} without pay) and then she selects about 15 of the top students (out of about 200) who may attend the University of Kentucky free of any charge other than a loose promise that they will return to this region to help with its development. My grandfather had one son who went to school for 3 days, my second uncle attended highschool and then his youngest son, my father, attended this Caney Jr College for 2 years and was offered a scholarship to the University- an opportunity for higher education that he wouldn't have recieved by any other means during these depression years. ★

The religious aspect of these people has always been very important to their way of life. The traditional religion was the "Old Regular Baptist". The members and preachers worked for 5 days a week and then went to church on Saturday and Sunday to hear "The word of the Lord." Each local church would hold service once a month and on the other 3 the members would visit another local church. Often "Long" ^{Trips} ~~travels~~ would separate a family for several days; especially at "Salvation Time."

within the past few years the Methodist have attracted many of the younger converts from the Baptist because of the youth programs and membership drives. The Catholics are getting several new members as they struggle to establish themselves - their members come from the upper class people and new people to the area.

★ This school is slowly being replaced by the attractiveness of Pikeville, Prestonsburg and Paintsville. The children dislike the strict code of conduct and dress demanded at Caney.

The oil, gas and coal industries developed almost at the same time and have been responsible for the rapid changes that have taken place ~~since~~ the turn of the century.

The first oil well was drilled ,in K.Y, about 1819 but it was almost 70 years before they came to the Eastern ~~part~~ of K.Y. In 1890 L.H. Gormley came to the Beaver Creek area and noticed the similarity of the geographic pattern to that of Pennsylvania and in 1892 he drilled a successful well at about 1000 feet, finding the Beaver Creek Pool, one of the ~~biggest~~ in K.Y.

As other drillings went on, more and more wells failed to hit oil but many did hit natural gas. They ~~called~~ this gas but didn't realize the potentials involved in such a find. The ~~people~~ burned wells night and day to keep bugs burned, keep cattle warm or provide a place for the men to gather when they wanted to drink or gamble. Today the gas Field in Langley is one of the largest in Kentucky and is the most stable influence in the community which has just built a processing plant and has a large compressor station in the town and another within 2 miles that employ several people in delivering gas to the industrial cities of the midwest and north.

The oil and gas development was paralleled by coal which is now the most important economic [?] to the people of Langley.

Coal was discovered in 1750 by Dr. Thomas Walker and within 100 years several companies were formed but due to poor transportation they were abandoned. For another $\frac{1}{2}$ century only local mines were worked to supply domestic needs and furnish other fuel needs. At the turn of the century John C. Mayo bought out the mining interest and put pressure on many rail-roading companies to extend themselves to this mineral ~~rich~~ area and in 1903 it entered Floyd County. It was 1913 before it got to Beaver where many mining operations got under way.

The people were slow to accept the "Foreigners" who came to open these new industries and doubly ~~skeptable~~ when it came to bringing in some outside labor force to make up for the somewhat uncompromising slowness of the local labor force that couldn't be depended on. There is still great ~~resentment~~ among the farmers who ~~feel~~ that the mines are ruining the land and the oil and gas plants have ~~poisoned~~ the waters. These people have retained a ~~fiere~~^{fiere} pride in their land but now usually are engaged in some other occupation to supplement their incomes.

The natives distrusted these "Foreigners" and reacted so violently that to this day there is no ~~real~~^{real} union action and there is a noticable lack of negro^s and foreigners. This distrust of different cultures has carried over until the miners don't trust the workers of ~~other~~ fields nor do they really trust ~~each~~ other. The farmers don't like the miners for they feel they are shiftless and lazy; the miners don't like the farmers who have failed to make the transition and both of these groups distrust the town merchants. Time has done little to overcome this and the ~~condition~~ is made ^{bigger} ~~bigger~~ by the fact that the different groups live in different sections of the township ~~area~~.

The violence that had been associated with the area became even more pronounced due to the ~~opportunities~~ presented by improved transportation. Maytown had developed out of a need for a train stop and was no exception to the roughness of the boom towns around. Most of the people lived from day to day and many were so mobile that they didn't care for the community as such. Many of these people had a vested interest in perpetuating lawlessness. Bootlegging is still so evident that one can buy whiskey in the only filling station on the main street of town. This store belongs to the most influential person in town (the man who hires the only policeman). Probably a major factor was the fact that the coal companies did little to help the town develop order but rather tried to make money from it. ^{Often} the owners were absentee owners.

People often ~~drunk~~ and fight on Saturday night and I know of one case ~~that had~~ 3 members of the same family killed on 3 successive Saturday nights during drinking fests in the same house. (This happened last year).

It is a common practice to burn personal property to get insurance when one needs money or if a business is losing money.

There even seems to be a pipeline to the local police (county force) which allows the bootleggers to continue and there is such difficulty in getting a conviction in our county courts that the local state police left for a period in 1959. They felt that it was impossible to get a drunk driving conviction and therefore they were wasting their time and effort.

One reason that these convictions were hard to get is that the officers and Judges are elected and this is one way they use of getting the needed votes to stay in power. My grandfather was county jailer for the last 20 years and during each election it was customary for the justice to release those in jail for minor charges so that they might go home and vote. It is also common to buy votes by either cash, whiskey or running a car pool to get a family to the polls. This great difficulty at election time is due to the great profits to be gained from county offices if one will use the power gained. It is expected that one will put several relatives on the payroll when he takes over.

The economy has prospered in the years following 1900 but is beginning to decline due to automation which has come to produce more coal than at any previous period with less manpower. The coal has been used in such a wasteful manner that that which is easiest to mine is gone and the people are now without work. Dwale, Wayland and Garrett are within only 5 or 10 miles of Langley yet today they are almost complete ghost towns.

The mining companies had used a closed economy to keep the miners in debt to them by allowing them to charge ahead in the company store and then taking the pay checks. This practice kept the miners about two months behind in payments and thus they couldn't afford to stop working. It is common practice for one to buy a \$75 item at the company store and then sell it some where else at about \$50 in cash. This is one of the ways that the miners got cash to gamble or drink with when the company kept their pay checks.

The mines had hit their peak during W.W. II when a combination of new transportation facilities and greater steel demand brought great prosperity but after the war it became evident that the mines were on a decline for the working days became less frequent. This decline was due to 3 major factors;

A. The public changed to gas and electricity in its cooking and heating demands.

B. The larger mines such as Inland steel could more effectively supply the demands of the far away steel companies. Now it is possible only for the 10 truck mines of Langley to sell to Inland steel or Princess Elchorn who are large enough to make real money.

C. Mechanization has been very important for today more fuel is produced than ever before but with a far less demand for manpower. Not only did this cut down on the manpower needed but put many smaller mines out of competition for they couldn't afford modern machinery needed.

When the work days became fewer and fewer some of the people didn't realize what was happening but many like my dad began to worry about the ever more frequent "L Day Week". The businesses of the area also began to feel the effects and credit became closer and closer as more were forced out of business by over extending themselves.

About 1945 the surrounding areas of Wavland and Garrett began to see their top personnel move out and these were followed by the non-property holders and finally by the 1960's these had become ghost towns. This could just have easily happened to Langley but I believe that the gas and oil incomes supplemented the failing coal until it has the opportunity to prosper.

The consumer habits have changed during this transitional period and the "Dollar Stores" have sprung up and the economy is being based on a lower expected income than ever before. Not only did the businessmen suffer a change but for a few years after the decline of the surrounding areas, Langley was marked by a feeling of pessimism and discouragement, but after seeing that their economy can survive while others fail, the town is now on a psychological upswing. New stores are being added to the 3 grocery stores, 2 clothing stores and post office. There is even a great deal of talk about trying to attract new industry for the feel it would be a cheap area with favorable land, available manpower and a bright future due to the fact that that entire end of Kentucky is witnessing great strides in transportation, education and communication.

Some people feel the whole area is destined to follow in the steps of the ghost towns but these were very shakened in their belief when the new Hydro-Carbon plant located there.

In their attempts to attract industry strong local leaders are emerging through the businesses, civic clubs and informal organizations. The Lions, Womans Club and P.T.A. are taking a very active interest in seeing that as many children as possible attend school and are helping with many other civic projects.

The people of different occupations are beginning to develop a set of very high values that are a bond between the different socio-economic groups. These people, who have always known violence and difficulty are now actively seeking an education for their children so that they might know a better way of life. I would say that the main theme of life in Langley is to give their children opportunities that they didn't receive.

It seems that there is a definite economic stratification in our community which is also based on civic interest. I would think that there is great prestige given to those who are active in the various clubs and civic projects. The second classification is based on those who attend Church on Sunday such as the Farmers who lead "A good Christian life" and the third class includes the people who bootleg, work in the mines or are unemployed.

This class awareness was evident in my school setting where we were taught to be especially "Nice" to some girls and if a boy of one class dated a lower class girl it was usually known what he was after. An upper class girl never dated a boy rated lower than herself.

Each of these classes tended to stay close together and have parties among themselves for by education and values their interests are different. The men associate more at sports events or work but the women's groups are based strictly on the status of the families involved.

There is a great overlap in the middle class but these are the real backbone of the township for they are the "Honest, law abiding citizens" who are basically family-oriented and show a great deal of concern for the church and community stability. These people also are interested in sports, especially those associated with the school.

The lower class are basically the poorer miners who live on John's Creek in unpainted rough houses. Many have no regular occupation and are referred to as lazy, shiftless drunkards by the other community classes.

The upper and most of the middle class have joined the Methodist Church but it is losing ground to the new Catholic Churches who are offering private school for the Children and a higher level of prestige. Many of the older members of the community belong to the Old Regular Baptist Church which was the biggest religion before the last half century brought such social and economic changes.

The lower economic classes often flock to revivals at the same type of sensationalism offered by the "Holy Rollers; the Nazarene or the Apostolic Churches.

I feel the people of Langley are profoundly interested in what others think of them; I would even say that this is true for the whole region for when these very natural people migrate they usually make many friends if given the opportunity and do well in labor. Yet many of these people, especially the lower class, seem to feel that they can't cope with or even face the problems of the world. I would think that this stems from the suddenness that brought the modern world into their world of isolation.

Within their own world the people have devised a means of keeping others in line for if you want to "Get Someone" the way to do it is through a seemingly friendly humor but this is so effective that some people become isolated to avoid it.

Rumors are also frequently used as a very effective means of getting at others. This is just about the extent that the people have used their influence But they are beginning to learn the value of group action. They had felt (in Eastern K.Y.) that they were cut off from the state and nation and so about 6 years ago they organized to attempt to cut themselves off as a separated state. This almost happened and got many state reforms. I would say that this action went a long way in getting Bert Combs elected, from the county seat of Prestonsburn, as Governor.

This isolation carried over to the families where it isn't uncommon for one to stress the independent social unit without need for visiting any friends. This is most evident in the Protestant groups that emphasize the need to abstain from the worldly pleasures such as movies or ball games.

The family usually consists of the father, mother and unmarried children although it isn't too uncommon to find the grandparents as members of the unit or even some married children under the same roof. The larger families seem to belong to the miners who live in the poor houses and under the most difficult economic conditions. This isn't necessarily true however for my neighbor on one side has 11 children and his brother on our other side has 9 and they farm, work for the gas company and sell logs, thus enjoying an economically sound life.

Marriage is less spectacular in Langley than at other places for here marriage is little more than a ceremony that ~~is~~ is accepted as the right way to do things but it isn't uncommon for a married man or woman to show interest in another person. A great deal of violence stems from this.

There are very few eligible people in this small town and about the only demand for a marriage partner is that they are of about the same class. The men feel like they aren't grown unless they have someone to cook and clean for them and the women want to get away from their families-often to a worse fate.

There are many problems developing due to the womens increasing independence, club works and attempts to take jobs outside the home. The men seem to resent the women making money for they feel they can and should care for them and the women should stay home and care for the children for prepare the evening meal.

Companionship between the husband and wife leave a lot to be desired for the men often fish and hunt while the wife stays at home. About once a month my mother and father invite other married couples up and the men play cards while the women talk or watch T.V. which is rather common.

The children are encouraged to attend school but the activities ~~at~~ at school have begun to take the children away from the family. This is also been increased by the fact that children have to go so far to the movie or to see their girl that they must use a car. Private parties and Petting may be considered problems but in relation to national averages our delinquency problem would be very low. The family does seem to be being pulled back together by television, school activities and more interest in family bowling or group activities.

In this period of community psychological and physical changes it seems that the majority of the people have developed deep grass roots. Many of them do go to Urban areas but often return on the week-ends for a visit "Home" but seldom do they find here what they had lost. It is a type of dream.

Among the different classes there seems to be a strong desire to conform to certain expectations. Once a person wasn't allowed out of his class, dress for each group was more or less set, pressure was applied in regard to social activities. This seems to be a decreasing characteristic for the new stress is on conformity, modernization and intellectualism. It seems to be quiet the thing for parents or intelligent youngsters, who have stopped school, to return to night classes.

The way of life has been changing and the majority of the people feel they can accept whatever happens to them. Many of the young people seem willing to settle for less than they might be able to do if they put some effort forward. They don't really feel they are part of the outside world but are destined to live within the security of the local area. Many loaf around town until marriage or army demands call them to change their life.

Summary

As I said before, there are differences in the classes but they do hold certain values in common. The most significant factor which is causing these to be more common is the fact that the township is small and personal contact is frequent.

I would say that personality was important to these people for they speak of the problems of the people and not of the town. If one is hurt in the mines or has some other difficulty then it isn't uncommon to have a community project to help them.

The people seem unable to face the problems of the world or even of their own little world and self-depreciation is evident. Drinking and gambling are common as means of escape.

These people are slow to accept differences and this cuts them off from others. This separation carries over into the class struggle. This isolation is contributed to by the religion which is characterized by deep fundamentalism.

The people who have been socially cut off from Langley lack real roots and move from place to place within and without the area in search of economic advantages. The majority of farmers and ^{socially} ~~socially~~ accepted seem to be in love with the area and wouldn't think of leaving, for Langley is their life.

Conformity seems to be a value too for the school children must have a certain dress to be accepted and this same principle applies to the adults who tend to drink, gamble and fight to prove themselves and thus be accepted.

Most of the people want their kids to attend high school but there is a lot of local debate in regard to extra curricular activities such as band and sports for this takes farming time and the children get away from the family.

The people have become resigned to this way of life and take it easy. They read or ^{Garden} garden but usually fail to have any real deep interest in life or any lasting friendships. Only 5 boys of our graduating class of 31 attended college and the other 14 are at home with irregular jobs or are in the army. These boys were intelligent but decided to settle for less than the horizons and goals that they might have achieved.

A WAY OF LIFE?

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